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ABSTRACT

Rewarding students for their achievements enhances self-esteem and confidence. These positive feelings permeate the school, improve the general climate, and raise the level of school pride. New and traditional methods of recognizing student groups such as a welcoming assembly, a spirit banner contest, and senior privileges can make students feel special. Among other effective student recognition techniques are student-of-the-month programs, birthday announcements, and special interest programs sponsored by academic departments. Many schools have developed outstanding student recognition programs. Examples from the following schools illustrate the possibilities: (1) Dobson High School in Mesa, Arizona; (2) Fremont Senior High School in Fremont, Nebraska; (3) Yarmouth Junior-Senior High School in Yarmouth, Maine; (4) Clear Lake High School in Houston, Texas; (5) Theodore Roosevelt High School in Kent, Ohio; (6) Boyd R. Larson Middle School in Troy, Michigan; (7) Irvington Middle School in Irvington, New York; and (8) Benjamin E. Mays High School in Atlanta, Georgia. (MLF)

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THE PRACTITIONER

nassp

A Newsletter for the On-Line Administrator

Vol. XV, No. 3 (ISSN 0192-6160) April 1989

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Student Recognition Programs

One way to motivate students is to recognize and reward their outstanding achievements. The empty feelings of a person whose good work goes unnoticed will usually have a negative impact on his or her learning.

In a recent editorial in the *NASSP NewsLeader*, NASSP Executive Director Scott Thomson said, "Americans tend to downplay recognition, except for our worship of athletes. Sports stars receive fame and fortune. Others who excel get less. Perhaps a misguided sense of Jeffersonian egalitarianism restrains our enthusiasm for recognizing scholars, statesmen, and artists. We seem to fear elevating the best for fear of debasing the rest." He went on to urge, "America needs to rediscover the value of recognition....High school students need recognition more today than ever before."

Educators must be creative in order to address the demands of a rigorous curriculum and to salvage potential dropouts. A creative school recognition program is a viable and inexpensive way to ensure a spirited and motivated student body.

Students who are especially studious, talented, or difficult usually receive special attention, all too often leaving the average student unnoticed and unrecognized. As a result, the average student runs the risk of developing low self-esteem.

Rewarding students for their achievements enhances self-esteem and confidence. These positive feelings permeate the school, improve the general climate, and raise the level of school pride.

Planning a Successful Program

Few, if any, successful programs have evolved accidentally. Thoughtful planning and experimentation are necessary to develop a viable student recognition program. Students march to the tune of different drummers. Careful planning by administrators, teachers, students, and parents is critical if meaningful and creative ways of highlighting student success are to be found.

People must feel that they are important to any group (or situation) to feel good about themselves and the group. A primary goal of schools should be to create a positive environment by recognizing students for a variety of reasons — from academics and athletics, to good citizenship and cooperation.

A creative school recognition program is a viable and inexpensive way to ensure a spirited and motivated student body.

Scholastic achievers are recognized across the country, but they seldom receive the public attention of, for example, a championship basketball team. A notable exception is the Excellence in Education Day in Battle Creek, Mich., where the entire community devotes a day to pay tribute to their outstanding educators and high school seniors.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has helped administrators in Battle Creek develop student and staff recognition programs. In 1983, the greater Battle Creek Area Educators Task Force was established to identify concerns and solve problems that were common to the school systems. One of the outstanding accomplishments of the task force was the development of an "Excellence in Education Day." This has become an annual day-long activity that recognizes both students and staff members.

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The day consists of three basic components; all other events revolve around them:

1) A morning workshop for K-12 teachers and administrators to tackle common problems of the school system.

2) A luncheon capped by the awarding of financial incentives to 20 outstanding educators designated by their school system. Criteria established by an educational task force are used to select honorees and the money is earmarked for professional growth.

3) A gala evening ceremony is held for students, attended by teachers and parents and selected underclassmen who serve as greeters and ushers. The spotlight is on the top 5 percent of the graduating class who all receive study scholarships in recognition of their academic achievements. Each honored student invites the educator who has had the most profound and positive effect on his academic history, from kindergarten to high school, to attend the gala.

Building School Traditions

New and traditional methods of recognizing student groups can be effective in making them feel special. This recognition is especially important when each class is attempting to establish its own identity. Recognition promotes class spirit and encourages students to take pride in their school. Consider building class pride and student morale with these ideas:

- *Welcoming Assembly.* New students and staff members are introduced and welcomed in the fall. Freshmen feel part of the school, rather than "the odd group out."
- *Spirit Banner Contest.* A banner is given to the class that yells the loudest, during fall, winter, and spring pep assemblies.
- *Senior Privileges.* Seniors may be afforded special privileges such as first place in lunch lines, using the senior lounge, or entering the auditorium last and leaving first.
- *Moving Up Day.* Juniors form an honor guard for departing seniors and then "move up" into the vacated senior seats.

Student of the Month Programs

A student of the month program is an excellent way of building student morale and boosting student spirit. Students who have excelled in a particular way or have made a conspicuous contribution to the school can be honored or recognized. It is advisable to have a committee of students, parents, and staff members establish criteria and selection guidelines. A poor selection can easily nullify any benefits to the school.

The following are useful ways to recognize the student of the month:

- A special announcement on the school marquee
- Notice in the local newspapers
- An article in school paper and/or yearbook
- A school assembly or activity
- Award plaques, pins, tie clasps, etc.

The Personal Touch

Recognizing students' birthdays is another way of making everyone feel special. The following are ways that schools may recognize student birthdays:

- Birthday announcements are posted daily, weekly, or monthly in a prominent place in the school.
- Birthdays are announced over the school public address system or published in the school newspaper.
- Student council members, class officers, club members, etc., make birthday cards for students.
- The school PTA purchases a large collection of paperbacks from which a student selects a copy on his/her birthday. Care should be taken to ensure that students whose birthdays fall during vacations are not excluded.

Special Interest Programs

Subject area activities can recognize a wide range of student interests and talents. Most department areas can sponsor contests, fairs, and exhibits that highlight student successes. The following programs are designed for the language arts or could be sponsored by the library, but they are typical of what most departments can readily offer.

- *Poetry and short story contests.* All participants attend an assembly at which certificates are presented. Trophies and ribbons are given to the winners in each grade, and the selections are published in a school book.
- *Poster Contest.* Recognition or prizes awarded for posters and book covers that are designed for favorite books.
- *Best Library Collection.* A prize is given to the senior with the best personal library.
- *Read-In.* All students and staff sit down to read at the same time. This is both a private and public demonstration of "connectedness."

To Illustrate

Many schools have developed outstanding student recognition programs. The following examples illustrate the range of possibilities.

Dobson High School
Paul C. Walsh, Principal

1501 West. Guadalupe Rd.
Mesa, Ariz. 85202-7575

The Dobson High School has an extensive academic recognition program. At mid-year, students who make straight A's are given special recognition. At the end of the school year, students are given awards in a variety of academic areas.

- Art
- Business
- English
- Foreign Languages
- Home Economics
- Industrial Arts
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social Studies
- Band
- Orchestra
- Chorus
- Physical Education
- Dance
- Speech
- Dramatics
- Debate

In addition, Principals' Awards are given to outstanding sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Other exceptional students are recognized by community and military organizations.

Fremont Senior High School
Ken Thomson, Principal

1750 N. Lincoln Ave.
Fremont, Nebr.
68025

Student recognition is vitally important to the Fremont faculty and administration when planning the curriculum and activities program. Highlights of the recognition program are:

- *Honor Wall*: Each year a plaque is engraved with the names of Cum Laude Society students, valedictorians, salutatorians, honor key students, best all-around student, and best citizen.
- *Athletic Picture Wall*: Each athletic team that wins a conference title, district title, or state title has its team picture placed on the athletic wall.

Recognition and Motivation

The sine qua non of student recognition in schools is a functional program of student motivation. The NASSP Model Schools Project (1969-74) researched many aspects of schooling. MSP findings on student motivation are among the project's most useful suggestions.

1. Wider choices are needed in the learning environment — places, selection of teachers, students to work with varied materials — all contribute to personal interests and potential satisfactions.
2. More flexible scheduling plus curriculum content that is more relevant to individual needs and interests are conducive to better motivation and achievement.
3. Each student needs a teacher adviser who cares and can act on the student's behalf.
4. The evaluating and grade reporting system should aim at positive rather than negative feelings.
5. Teachers, parents, and citizens should focus all resources on ways to improve the school, including student motivation and recognition.

- *Student of the Month*: Curriculum departments identify "students of the month." A letter is sent to parents; students are mentioned in the personnel report at board meetings; and students' names are listed on the local educational television channel.
- *Honor Roll*: Names of honor roll students are listed in the newspaper and posted on the school bulletin board. Parents of honor students receive badges to wear at parent/teacher conferences, and letters are sent to employers of honor students.
- *Art Work*: Student artwork is displayed in the school, in the board of education meeting room, in the central office hallways, and in the community fine arts hall.
- *Commencement/Baccalaureate*: All salutatorians and valedictorians have the opportunity to speak at commencement or baccalaureate. National Honor Society students wear white pendants, and scholarship winners and Cum Laude students are recognized during the ceremonies.

Yarmouth Junior-Senior High School
Kenneth P. Nye, Principal
W. Elm St.
Yarmouth, Maine 04096

At Yarmouth, a junior-senior high school encompassing grades 7-12, the faculty implemented programs to recognize underclass students. The Junior High Merit Roll recognizes and rewards good behavior by junior high level students. At the end of each semester, the 7th and 8th grade teachers compile a list of students who have consistently exhibited good classroom behavior, exemplary study hall and corridor behavior, and general overall positive attitude toward classes, school, and classmates, and have regularly completed homework assignments. Students on the Merit Roll receive school buttons to wear.

Rewarding students for their achievements enhances self-esteem and confidence.

Another way of recognizing students is the recently established Effort Honor Roll. This program recognizes students who may never be able to make one of the academic honor rolls but who show real improvement in grades from one quarter to the next. To qualify for the Effort Honor Roll, a student's quarterly grades in at least two subjects must improve at least one letter grade. The names of students who have achieved recognition on the Effort Honor Roll are listed in the newspaper along with the names of students on the High Honor and Honor Roll. In the spring, a banquet is held to honor all the students who have made the honor rolls.

The school sponsors the traditional National Honor Society, French Honor Society, and the Thespian Honor Society. Special school assemblies are held where new members are "tapped." Names of students who make the High Honor Roll and the Honor Roll are published in local area papers quarterly.

Clear Lake High School
Edgar Taylor III, Principal
2929 Bay Area Blvd.
Houston, Texas 77058

Clear Lake High School is described as a "special place," and the faculty, administration, and parents cooperate in recognizing students in these special ways:

- *Academic Breakfast*—For the fine arts competitors.
- *Awards Night*—Honors students who have received scholarships and honors from various departments in the school.
- *Honors Banquet*—Held for students who excel in sports, band, speech, and debate.
- *Daily Announcements*—Randomly recognize outstanding students.
- *Weekly Calendar*—"Spotlights" students who excel.
- *Electronic Bulletin Board*—In "commons" room to inform students of honors, events, etc.
- *Outside Marquee*—Displays announcements and student honors.
- *Merit Scholar Display Case*—Lists all commended and merit scholar students in the school.
- *Parents-Teachers-Students Reception*—Honors all students, teachers, and parents.

Theodore Roosevelt High School
Martin M. Kane, Principal
1400 N. Mantua St.
Kent, Ohio 44240

The positive accomplishments of students are recognized in many ways, but perhaps one of the more creative efforts has been the development of a "privilege system." This program is designed for students in the junior and senior class who are passing all their classes and are good citizens. They may:

- Participate in summer self-scheduling, which allows rising seniors to schedule their classes themselves.
- Choose between going to the library, the student center, or a quiet study hall during non-class time.
- Either arrive at school late in the morning or go home one period earlier in the afternoon (juniors only).
- Leave the building for lunch (seniors only).
- Participate in one of the following three options (seniors eligible for graduation only):
  —A community service project
  —A career shadowing experience
  —An educational experience that cannot be done in school.

Other ways of recognizing students are institutionalized at Roosevelt:

1. Each week, the high school produces a *Monday Morning Bulletin*. The bulletin is divided into different sections. In the "Praises To" section, outstanding student achievements are noted.

2. A monthly parent newsletter entitled "Branching Out" is sent home to arrive on the first day of the

month. The newsletter lists the names of as many students as possible who are worthy of recognition. In a typical month, the newsletter is between 8 and 10 pages long. The intent of the newsletter is to ensure that people in the city of Kent associate Roosevelt High School with successful students.

Thoughtful planning and experimentation are necessary to develop a viable student recognition program.

3. Letters and cards are sent home to students who achieve. For example, students receive letters for making the Merit Roll or the Honor Roll, doing well on a competitive examination, becoming a member of a club or activity, making an athletic team, etc.

4. A student recognition luncheon is held each month in each department. The staff members in the department are asked to choose 25 students they believe are most worthy of recognition. Then, those students are sent a formal invitation to attend a luncheon held at a local restaurant. After the luncheon, the department introduces each student and says a little bit about him or her. The students' names are publicized throughout the school and community.

5. An attempt is made to ensure that one student worthy of recognition is announced over the PA system each day.

6. The announcement marquee in front of the school is changed each day. This sign is not used to announce activities; rather, it is used to list the names of students who have made outstanding accomplishments or received some significant award or achievement. Accomplishments such as earning a 4.0 average, being enrolled in the National Honor Society, becoming a National Merit Semifinalist, earning a scholarship, etc., are examples of accomplishments recognized.

7. Student leaders are invited to a three-day, two-night leadership workshop in the fall — an excellent way to reward those students who extend superior effort in the cocurricular program.

8. A National Merit Semifinalist picture gallery is exhibited in one of the main hallways of the school.

Boyd R. Larson Middle School
William P. Jacka Principal
2222 E. Long Lake Rd.
Troy, Mich. 48098

A Student of the Week program highlights the way this middle school recognizes students. Bi-weekly, faculty members are asked to complete a nomination form and return it to the principal. Criteria for recognition are:

- Service
- Leadership
- Cooperation
- Positive Attitude
- Academic Improvement
- Initiative and Responsibility
- A Unique Contribution to School or Community

Nominated students receive a letter of congratulations and are presented with a certificate. A picture taken of them receiving the certificate is posted at school for the rest of the school year.

The school also recognizes students in several other ways:

- *Readers of the Week.* Usually one faculty member and five students have their pictures posted in the Media Center along with a list of the types of reading they enjoy.
- *Writers of the Month.* A language arts teacher selects outstanding student writings for display.
- *A-Team.* Students who receive all As in a given marking period are honored at a reception with their parents. At that time they receive a certificate.
- *Report Card Notes.* Notes of encouragement and congratulations are written on report cards at the end of the school year to let students know that teachers and administrators care and are pleased with their progress in school.

Irvington Middle School
Andrew C. Kerfut, Principal
101 Main St.
Irvington, N.Y. 10533

The student and parent reaction to the school's "Good News Gram" is enthusiastic and enhances the school climate. When a student has achieved something that merits recognition, the principal sends a Certificate of Commendation to the parent, accompanied by a letter of congratulations.

The school also publishes an Achievement-Improvement list at the end of the second, third, and fourth quarters. This list recognizes students who maintain a B average or improve a grade since the previous quarter.

Benjamin E. Mays High School
Rubye D. McClendon, Principal

3450 Benjamin E Mays Dr., S.W.
Atlanta, Ga. 30331

Numerous businesses in the Atlanta area recognize and honor students for outstanding achievements. In addition, students with a 3.4 GPA are inducted into the National Beta Club and students with a 3.6 GPA, into the National Honor Society. Both formal induction ceremonies are held at an assembly in the spring. Other ways that the high school honors its students are:

- *Journal Cup*: Presented to the student selected by staff members and teachers as the best all-around senior.
- *Principal's Cup*: Presented to a well-rounded senior chosen by the principal.
- *Top Ten Percent Banquet*: Held in the spring for top students, honors students, and their parents.
- *Academic Letters*: Awarded at the Senior Awards Assembly in June to seniors with all As.
- *Announcements and Administrative Bulletin*: Recognize students for all accomplishments on a daily basis via the intercom, and on a weekly basis by bulletin.
- *Hosts/Hostesses, Guides*: Honor students act as ushers for special assemblies and guides for visitors who come for special tours of the school.
- *Academic Hall of Fame*: Recognizes outstanding students on a special Hall of Fame Board in the main lobby of the school.

This Practitioner was prepared by Edward J. Klesse, assistant superintendent for instruction, and Nancy A. Biernat, Leadership Program Coordinator, Sweet Home High School, Amherst, New York.

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